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NATIONAL CAPITOL PLANNING COMMISSION - February 1967

THE PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITOL

**REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS
OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

REGIONAL ASPECTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The City of Washington plays three roles, as described above. It is the national capital, the home of nearly a million people, and the central city of a large metropolitan area. In its metropolitan role, the city exerts a powerful effect on the surrounding communities and in turn is vitally affected by developments in the whole Region. This chapter reviews the regional considerations influencing the Comprehensive Plan, and points out the most important implications of the plan for the rest of the metropolitan area.

The regional environment has figured prominently in past planning for the City of Washington. The act of 1926 establishing the National Capital Park and Planning Commission authorized that body to make plans for the environs as well as the District of Columbia. The Commission established a long record of cooperation with the suburban Maryland and Virginia planners in the development of the George Washington Memorial Parkway and a system of stream-valley parks authorized by the Capper-Cramton Act, and its comprehensive Plan of 1950 included recommendations for parks, highways, and other improvements in the suburbs. Since passage of the National Capital Planning Act in 1952, the National Capital Planning Commission has worked closely with the suburban jurisdictions through the National Capital Regional Planning Council. Both the Transportation Plan of 1959 and the *Policies Plan for the Year 2000* were collaborative efforts by Commission and Council.

THE CHALLENGE OF REGIONAL GROWTH

All planning for Washington and its metropolitan region is affected by one outstanding fact—the population of the Region is likely to continue its rapid growth for many years to come. The Comprehensive Plan is based on an assumed growth from 2.6 million in 1966 to 3.7 million or more in 1985. At such a rate of increase, this metropolitan area would continue to be one of the fastest growing in the Nation, as it has been for many years.

This prospective growth raises some basic policy questions. How much of the new metropolitan population should be accommodated within the District? How many new jobs should be located there? What

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kines, and employment centers, transportation facilities, and other developments should be provided for the District's share of regional growth?

The foregoing pages have proposed answers to these questions. The Comprehensive Plan is based on a set of policies which call for an increase in the District's population from 810,000 in 1966 to 950,000 in 1985, and an increase in employment from about 600,000 to about 800,000. The Plan proposes the development and redevelopment of the District in a manner which will improve the quality of living throughout the city while accommodating this growth.

Plans for the District are also affected by the suburban response to continued population growth. The pattern of development in the suburbs can have important implications for the central city in all aspects of urban life—housing, employment, transportation, education, recreation, etc.

The Year 2000 Plan

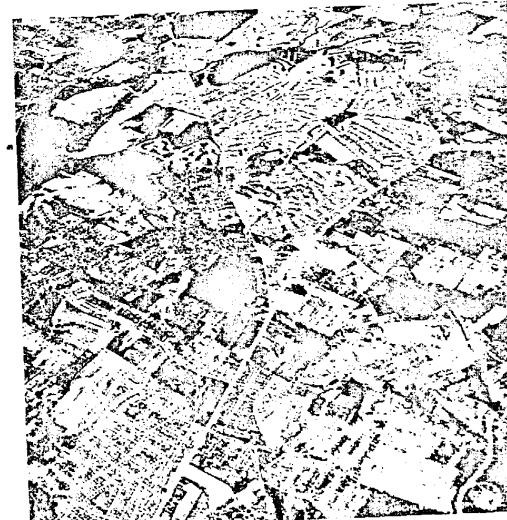
The *Policies Plan for the Year 2000*, published in 1961, was prepared in recognition of the interdependence of plans for the city and for the suburbs. This document set forth broad policies to guide the growth of the whole metropolitan area. These policies are worthy of a brief summary here, since they provide a good starting point for a consideration of the regional aspects of the Comprehensive Plan.

The *Year 2000* policies were based on an assumed growth of the Region's population to 5 million in the *Year 2000*. The population of the District would increase only a little, so the great bulk of the regional population growth would take place in the suburbs. The Central Area of Washington would still be the dominant employment center in that year, containing about one-half of the region's Federal jobs and one-third of all employment.

A large part of the suburban growth would be concentrated in new communities with populations of about 100,000. Each community would have a compact and intensively developed business district serving as its "downtown." These communities would be located along corridors radiating from Washington. A rapid transit line and a freeway would follow each corridor, and there would be a transit station in each downtown center. Each suburban community would have a variety of housing, with high-density developments located near the center and progressively lower densities extending outward. Large amounts of open space would be preserved within the "wedges" between the corridors.



SUBURBS. The Regional population growth will be in the suburbs, with Washington's population increasing only slightly. Although a large part of it will be in new towns, present communities also have to plan for more residents, such as Bethesda, above, and Wheaton, below—itself a new development since World War II.



The *Year 2000* report also briefly outlined some of the new legislation, organizational arrangements, and financial measures needed to carry out its proposals. The report stressed that coordinated activities of many kinds, by many public and private organizations, would be needed to create new towns and preserve large amounts of open space in the Region.

Subsequent Plans and Developments

The *Year 2000* policies, recommended by the National Capital Planning Commission and the National Capital Regional Planning Council and endorsed by President John F. Kennedy, have guided much of the subsequent planning and many of the key development decisions in the Region.

One such decision was the approval by Congress in 1965 of a rapid transit system for the District of Columbia. This system, when extended to the suburbs, will provide an essential element in the corridor pattern of growth.

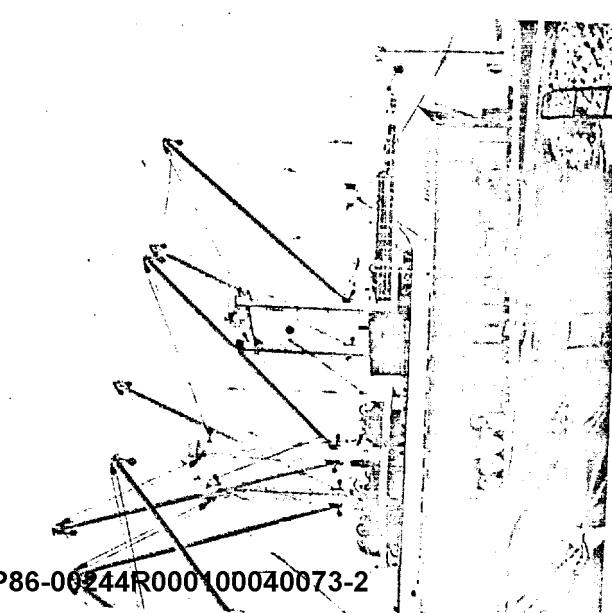
The Maryland and Virginia planning agencies proceeded to prepare more detailed plans for their areas, applying the *Year 2000* policies with some modifications to meet local conditions. The suburban Maryland plan, set forth in a publication entitled "On Wedges and Corridors," was adopted by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in January 1964. The Northern Virginia Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission is now considering a proposed "General Plan—Year 2000."

While local policymakers have not always accepted the policies and plans stemming from the *Year 2000* document, many important development decisions since 1961 have been influenced by, and have been in reasonable conformity with, the *Year 2000* policies. An outstanding example is the new town of Reston in Fairfax County, now partly built and occupied, which embodies many of the design concepts of the *Year 2000* report.

Progress has been less satisfactory in preserving the large areas of open space along the Potomac River and in other open-space wedges. While the local park agencies are purchasing sizable tracts for recreational use, scattered subdivisions are proliferating across much of the Region's open space. There has also been relatively little progress in providing the governments of the Region with the organizational structure, legal powers, and fiscal capabilities need to shape the Region's future development along *Year 2000* lines.



CHARACTERISTICS. Many of the suburban communities are set by their own characteristics. College Park, above, is the home of the University of Maryland and its sprawling campus which dominates the town. Alexandria's port, below, once made that city a commercial center.



Among significant recent developments are the establishment of a regional transportation planning organization and transit development agencies in both Maryland and the Virginia suburbs, and proposals for expansion of the activities of the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments.

Reaffirmation of the Year 2000 Plan

While progress in implementing the *Year 2000* policies has been slow, the basic conception of a regional growth on which these policies were based remains valid, and has guided the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan. This concept may be summarized as follows:

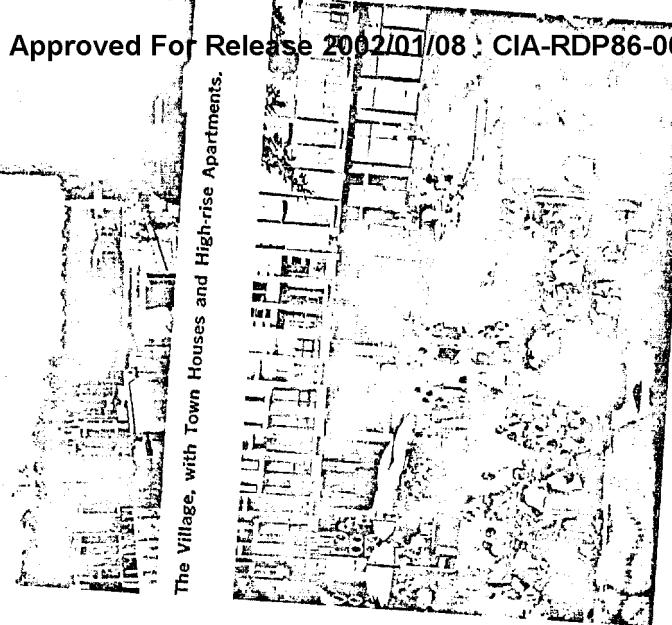
The District of Columbia should absorb only a small share of the Region's added population, most of which should be accommodated in new towns along radial corridors served by rapid transit and freeways, and separated by open space. The Central Area of the District should remain the dominant employment center, but the large majority of new jobs should be located elsewhere, many of them in the business districts of the new towns. Federal employment should continue to be concentrated in the Central Area of the District, but most new Federal jobs should be located elsewhere in the District and in the suburbs.

THE PATTERN OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

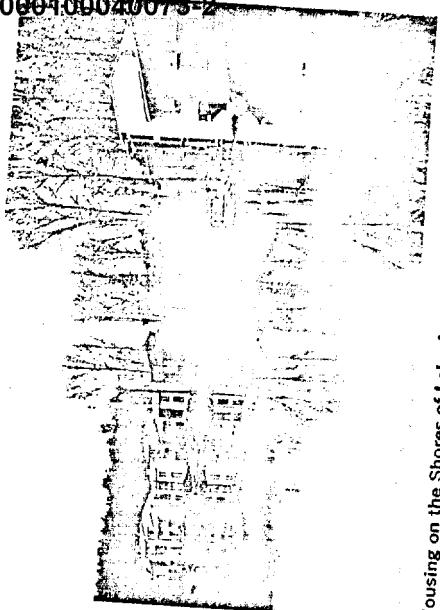
The following paragraphs review the features of this Plan with regional implications, indicate the points of correspondence to the *Year 2000* proposal, and explain the deviations from the earlier policy statement.

Distribution of Population

The *Year 2000* report declared that the future development of the District of Columbia "should be keyed more to an improved quality of living environment than to accommodating a significant population increase during the decades ahead." This policy did not altogether preclude any increase in the city's population. The Comprehensive Plan proposes an increase that is perhaps larger than that foreseen by the *Year 2000* report, but that can nonetheless be achieved without sacrificing the objective of "improved quality of living environment." From the regional point of view, this plan assumes that the overwhelming ma-

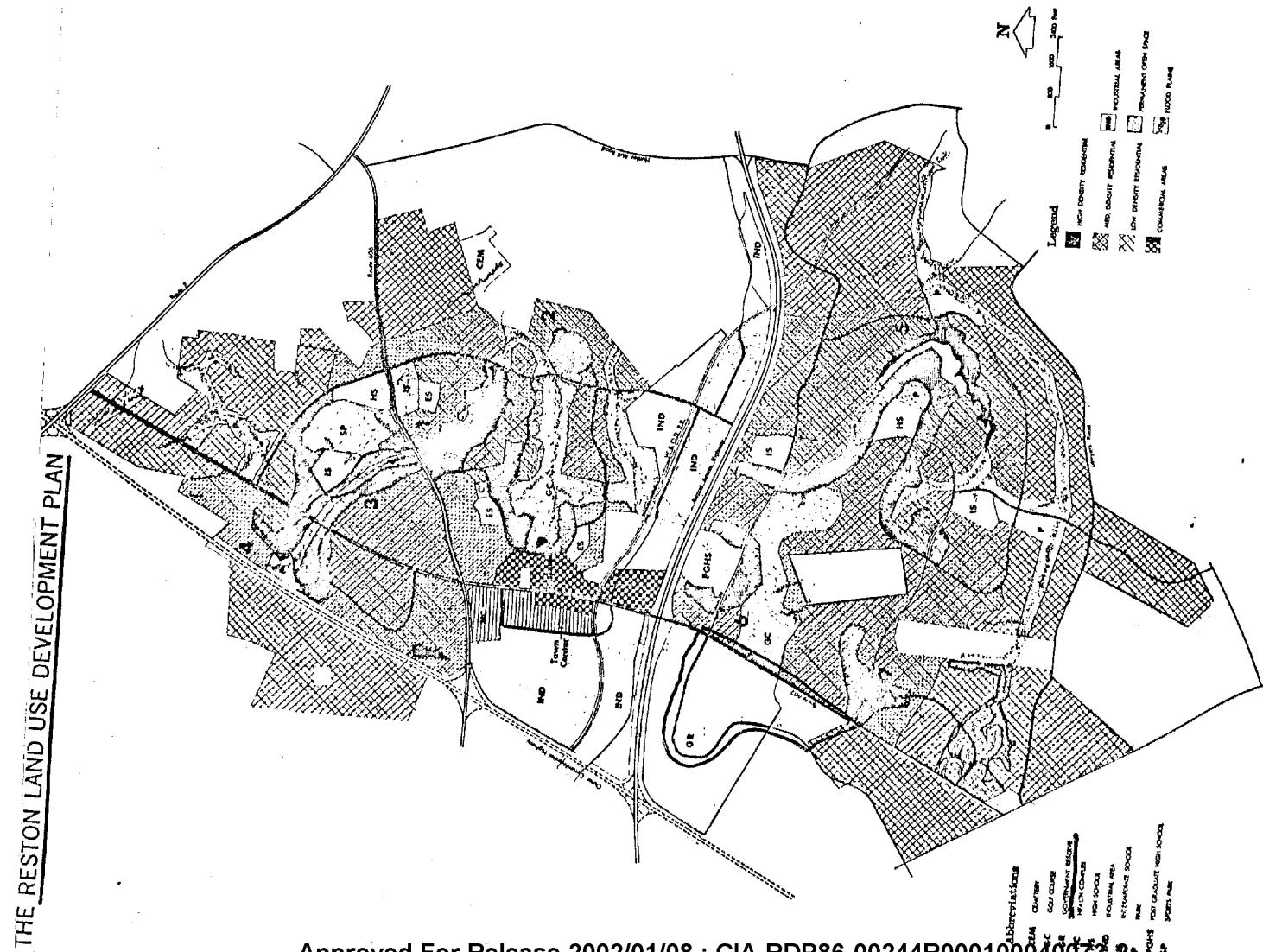


The Village, with Town Houses and High-rise Apartments



Washington Plaza, by Lake Anne

Housing on the Shores of Lake Anne.



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jority of the new population (about 90 percent of it) will have to be accommodated in the suburbs, which will have three-fourths of the Region's population by 1985.

Distribution of Employment

The Year 2000 report called for continued concentration of a large proportion of the Region's employment in the District of Columbia, while recognizing that the majority of new jobs would necessarily be located in the suburbs. The Comprehensive Plan is in harmony with this policy. While it proposes an ambitious 40 percent increase in jobs in the CENTRAL EMPLOYMENT AREA, the total for the whole District would increase by only one-third, to 800,000. This means that employment in the rest of the Region will surpass that in the District, growing more than 70 percent to over 800,000 in 1985.

Transportation

The Year 2000 policies called for a network of freeways and rapid transit that would assure good access to downtown Washington for large numbers of workers and shoppers, and would provide efficient movement along the radial corridors.

The Comprehensive Plan, while proposing some changes in the transportation network, is still designed to achieve these basic objectives, though the highways serving downtown Washington will not be able to carry peak-hour traffic without congestion. The freeway and transit lines will, upon extension into the suburbs, provide the mobility necessary for development along the corridor pattern.

Thousands of the future inhabitants of the Region will be able to live and work in a physical setting far superior to any that we know today. Furthermore, the people of the Region will be able to travel more efficiently and economically than will be the case if the present sprawling pattern of growth is further extended.

Successful development of the new towns will require that sizable amounts of new Federal employment initially be concentrated in a small number of them. Once they reach a viable size, additional new towns may be begun.

Open Space

Comprehensive Plan proposals for parks within the District include recommendations that would bring all of the riverfront area within the District into public ownership. This is, in effect, a reaffirmation of the long-standing Federal interest in protecting the banks of the Potomac within the entire metropolitan area from private development.

On the other hand, the growth trends that offer such promise for the creation of new towns at the same time pose a great threat to the Region's remaining open space. If strong measures are not taken promptly, new suburban development will very rapidly obliterate hundreds of miles of prime open land.

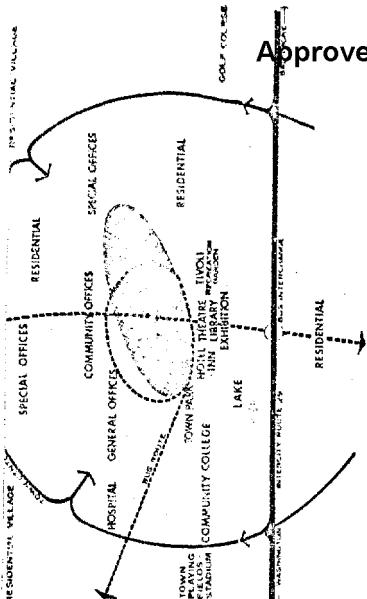
Other Regional Implications of the Plan

Some other aspects of the Comprehensive Plan, not so closely related to the main features of the Year 2000 plan, are worthy of notice.

The plan's proposal for maintenance of low or moderate densities in large parts of the District will provide added impetus to high-density development in the suburbs. For the strong demand for high-rise office and residential space will have to be met largely in the suburbs if the District maintains its long-established limitation on building heights and preserves large areas for single-family homes, rowhouses and garden apartments. This suggests that there will be continued growth of multistory office and residential developments in the suburbs, not only in Rosslyn, Silver Spring, Bethesda, and other centers that have developed rapidly in recent years, but in new centers of intensive development.

Some of the proposed developments close to the District line will require close coordination with suburban Maryland planners. The most important of these will be the centers of intensive development around rail transit stations at Takoma Park and Friendship

GREEN WEDGES. The Year 2000 Plan calls for corridors radiating from Washington for development of communities. The wedges if between would be kept open and green, such as this farmland near Seneca.



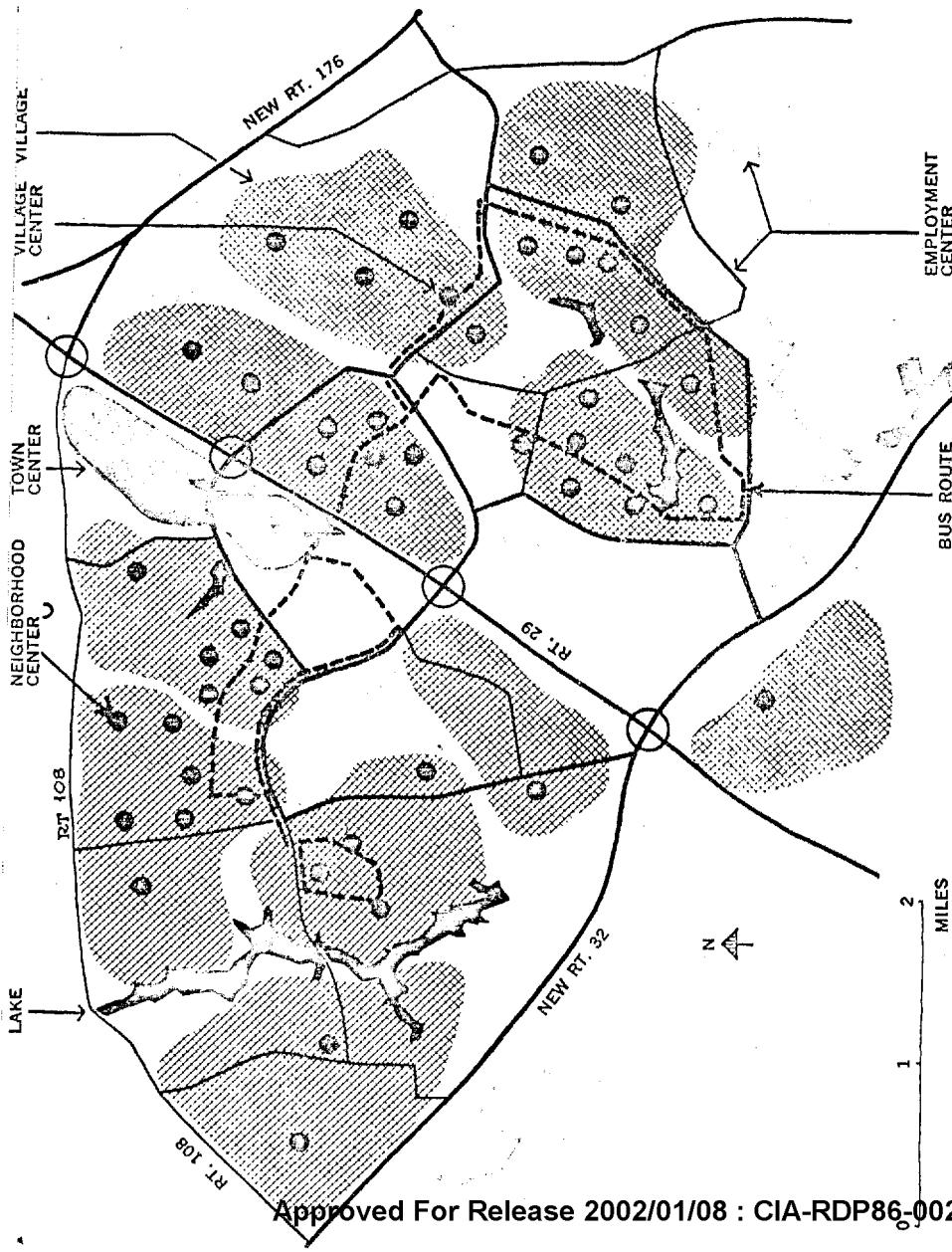
Town Center Plan Diagram.



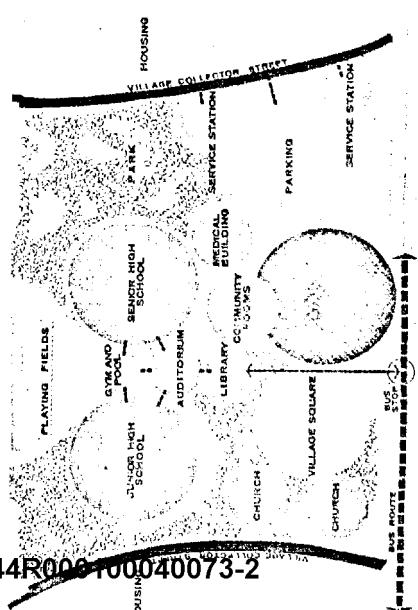
The Town Center, in the Model.



The Village Center, at Eye Level.



The Village Center, in the Model.



Village Center Plan Diagram.

Heights. These should be designed and developed as single entities, in accordance with plans jointly prepared and adopted by the planning agencies for the District of Columbia and Maryland.

THE PROGRAM FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Just as the physical features of the Comprehensive Plan have implications for the pattern of suburban growth, so the program of action that is followed in the District of Columbia should have its counterparts in the suburbs. There is a need for a Regional Development Program, which would provide for a large number of activities needed to shape regional growth.

A New Towns Program

The new towns proposed for the radial corridors will not be brought into being simply by the adoption of land use plans, the revision of zoning ordinances and maps, and other measures of the sort that have been used by the suburban governments to exercise some control over growth in the past. A great variety of governmental actions will be needed, in close cooperation with all of the diverse private activities that go into the making of new suburban communities today. It will be necessary to correlate these actions in a well-organized and coordinated program of new town building. Of first importance is the creation of a Federal agency responsible for providing the initiative and planning needed to get a successful new towns program underway, and for marshalling the many Federal contributions that will be necessary, notably the allocation of Federal employment to the new towns and provision of some of the financial backing. The county governments will probably need to establish new departments or agencies, performing or at least coordination such functions as land use planning, provision of roads and other public works, and acquisition of land for public (and perhaps for private) purposes. Special financing arrangements will probably be needed to provide the large-scale public improvements that will be required, and the whole program will depend upon broad new legislative authorization.

same quality as in the revitalized central city and the new towns.

This will require numerous organizational, administrative, and fiscal improvements. Of special importance will be programs for the renewal of some of the older suburban business centers, to convert them into efficient "downtowns" for the surrounding communities. A wide range of powers, exercised by new organizational units, will be needed for suburban renewal.

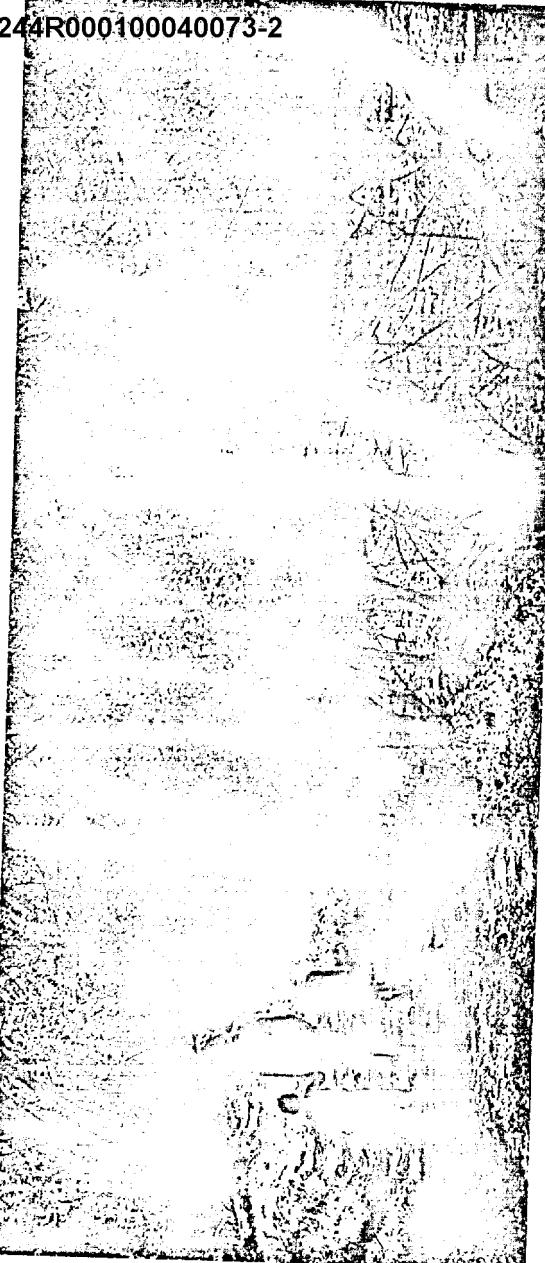
A Transportation Program for the Suburbs

Provision of freeways and rapid transit along the radial corridors will make great demands upon the state and local governments. A start on suburban rapid transit planning is already being made by transit commissions established in Northern Virginia and in the suburban Maryland area by the two state legislatures. A regional transit development agency has been established by an interstate compact approved by the two state legislatures and Congress. Rapid transit and probably freeway development will both require new financing arrangements.

An Open-Space Program

The most difficult task for suburban legislators and administrators will be to secure the effective preservation of many hundreds of square miles of open space within a short space of time. While regulatory measures

PARKLAND. The Region's most important open space asset is the Potomac and its shores. The C & O Canal stretches along the Maryland-District bank, for a long distance through undeveloped land, and should be maintained that way for hikers, nature-lovers and conservationists, and as a means of the days when the was a chief means of commerce with the west.



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Suburban Development and Renewal

There should be significant improvements in the quality of the suburban development outside the new towns, and reconstitution of existing suburban communities to create an improved environment of the

and revised taxing arrangements may be of considerable value, large amounts of money will probably have to be invested in land or rights in land, in order to assure that the open land remains permanently in that condition.

The Region's most important open-space asset, the Potomac River and its shores, should be the subject of continued special attention, not only from the local governments, but from the states and Federal agencies in a coordinated program.

A Metropolitan Housing Program

The housing needs of the metropolitan area can only be met by an areawide program of action. This must include, above all, the opening of suburban housing to occupancy by Negroes. The Federal Government should not allocate additional Federal employment to any local jurisdiction in the Region until enactment of local open occupancy legislation. The Regional Development Program should also include the establishment of an organization to provide housing for those income groups which cannot afford to buy or rent adequate housing without public assistance. The proposed housing authority will be of special importance to the suburbs, which have not only the underdeveloped land needed for low-income housing, but a rapidly growing industrial sector which will require sizable numbers of workers who cannot afford the housing now available in the suburbs.

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